

# Sukhomlinsky News

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## The power of example

*In this month's extract from the fourth chapter of Pavlysh secondary school Sukhomlinsky describes the sort of morally significant activities that his students engaged in as they developed an independent moral stance. The experience of growing a bountiful crop of grapes on 3000 square metres of previously unused land, and of sharing the harvest with the villagers, was an exercise in putting community values into practice. Sukhomlinsky frequently contrasts such community-minded behaviour with narrow self-interest.*

*In the more everyday matter of completing studies, Sukhomlinsky encouraged his students to set themselves challenges, to choose the more difficult options when offered choices, rather than the easier path to success. This is also considered part of their education in values.*

*As usual I have translated three of Sukhomlinsky's little stories for children. One of them shows that the power of example can act for both good and ill, as a child absorbs the cruel indifference of his father. Another illustrates the uniquely human quality of hope.*

*Best wishes,*

*Alan Cockerill*

## Values in practice

**In this issue we continue our translation of the fourth chapter of Pavlysh Secondary School, on moral education, as Sukhomlinsky explains what practical activities his students engaged in as they put values into practice.**

At our school nine and ten-year-old students have already had the emotional and moral experience of socially useful activity. They have seen the results of their work for society, for example growing grape seedlings, and have experienced joy in this. The early experience of this feeling is exceptionally important for the formation of moral convictions. Such feelings lead a child to be concerned if they have not done anything for others. By the time they reach adolescence, students see the results of their consistent socially useful work: an orchard that has been cultivated in a previously barren area, a field with a rich crop, where previously the soil was not fertile. By their late teens students have moral wealth: the joy of knowing that they have graced the earth with their work. This feeling gives rise to true patriotism, and a sense of civic duty.

We give a lot of weight to the moral significance of independent work to acquire knowledge. We try to ensure that all students experience feelings of self-worth when studying. From their first days at school we awaken feelings of joy in the acquisition of knowledge. An emotional appreciation of success becomes an important feature of intellectual work. Teacher and students become enthused by a common intellectual goal: to know, to discover the truth, to overcome difficulties.

[Continued on the following page]

## Values in practice (continued)

When students see that the teacher takes joy in their successes and is disappointed by their failures, these feelings are transferred to them, and in this way they are convinced by experience that work that they do to acquire knowledge through their own efforts brings satisfaction. That is why we seek to ensure that of two ways to acquire knowledge—one that is easy and carefree, but does not bring the satisfaction of overcoming obstacles, and one that is difficult and thorny, accompanied by the joy of creativity—children consciously choose the second path. This choice depends on how clearly an educator has managed to reveal to children the aim of work: not only to achieve an end, but to affirm one's moral worth, to show what one is capable of. The more often children make the correct choice, the more deeply they realise that choosing to complete work or not to complete it, to see it through to the end or to abandon it half way through, is a matter of personal honour, of worth. To reveal to children the significance of study is a whole area of educational creativity, and we have many types of assignment with the clearly expressed goal of having children experience the feelings associated with honourable labour.

During our arithmetic lessons we normally give the children several variants of problems and examples for independent work, with varying levels of difficulty. Students are given the option of choosing any variant. The children are very sensitive to this freedom of choice and see in it an opportunity to affirm their honour. This intellectual work takes on the character of a keen and interesting competition.

Many assignments set for students consist of two parts: one

that is compulsory, and another that is supplementary and voluntary, intended for those who wish to complete more than is demanded. The supplementary task is closely connected to the compulsory one. Independent work takes on a moral significance: students choose of their own free will to do something that is attractive because of the opportunity it affords to test their strength of will. The aspiration to choose the most difficult path gradually becomes a moral habit. Moral refinement consists of moral habits that have become an emotional custodian of behaviour. The voice of conscience of an educated person does not permit them to even consider copying a friend's work. For them this is just as impermissible as appearing naked in public.

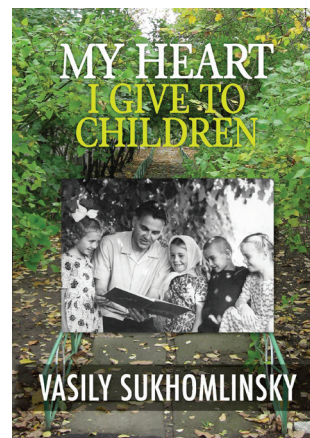
In this way a certain line of conduct is formed, characterised by an organic intolerance of deception, of dishonour, of taking the easy path to success. It is only possible for each person to develop such a line of conduct when moral convictions are built on the firm foundation of moral habits.

Moral habits, associated with an idea that inspires good conduct, this is the ABC of moral refinement. Just as a literate person reads a word without thinking about each letter, so for a morally educated person it is not necessary to find a logical basis for a noble action. But just as the reading of words is impossible without letters, moral conviction is impossible without actions, without moral habits.

A person's moral refinement is characterised by the fact that their moral convictions have become an independent spiritual force, prompting new moral actions. The establishment of this independence depends on what

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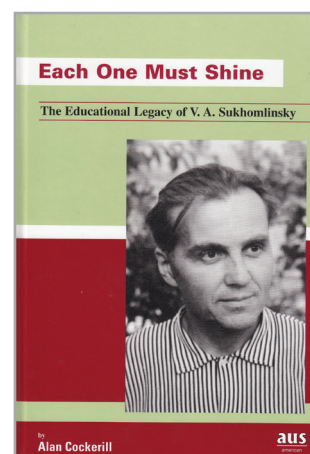
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the life of the community and the life of the individual are filled with. One day, one hour, during which a person displays strength of spirit, may play a greater role in their life than years during which they did not really express themselves. A school should strive to see that conviction should become an independent spiritual force in their students as early as possible. We may refer to this period in a person's spiritual life as moral maturity. Most of our students enter this period during adolescence and early youth. Let us examine in detail how the moral development of students occurs during this period.

### **How convictions develop and strengthen during the period of moral maturity**

Ideas become firm convictions when they are not only meaningful, but are hard won, when these ideas have triumphed due to the investment of spiritual effort. The formation of philosophical and moral convictions is an active process in which students are not passive objects of education, but actively strive to establish values in their souls. People's moral character during adolescence and youth depends on the philosophical direction that guides their actions and behaviour. We seek to ensure that the spiritual efforts of our adolescents and young men and women are directed towards the achievement of goals of great social significance. People should do as much as possible in the name of an ideal. The work or task that fills their lives should be a means of achieving an ideal, and not an end in itself.

Young people are very sensitive to the moral significance of each task that is proposed for them, of each action that they perform. If you tell senior students that they have to harvest beetroot in cold autumn weather, without explaining why they should take on such a difficult task, you will

be met with indifference and a reluctance to work. Young men and women are always interested in the moral significance of the work they are asked to do. If they see that they have to make a great effort to compensate for someone else's negligence or laziness, that work loses any educational significance. It is only possible to attract young people to work that has resulted from someone else's laziness if they already have a high level of moral conditioning. In such cases the goal is not only to achieve a certain amount of work, but to fight against evil, laziness, indifference and egoism. Only then will the consciousness of overcoming difficulty elevate the students in their own eyes. If the young people do not feel themselves to be battling with evil, and emerging as victors in that battle, they should not in any circumstances be asked to complete work to make up for someone else's inactivity.

It is especially important to show students the moral significance of work when that work is of a monotonous nature, of little interest in itself, and very difficult. We always try to convey to our students' hearts and minds the significance of their work, so that participation in the work does not shake their convictions but strengthens them.

We lead our students from noble actions, associated with pure feelings, to a conviction that people, through their own work, can transform the face of the Earth and themselves, that simple daily work in the interests of the nation is indeed that patriotic and heroic deed to which young people aspire. We seek to ensure that this conviction becomes an inner strength, inspiring new noble actions, and sacred, inviolable rules of personal conduct for each student.

During adolescence and youth our students are inspired by work

that has symbolic significance, that provides a material manifestation of a great social idea, a proof that such an idea is realisable in practice.

Several years ago, we planted grape vines on the bare slope of a gully. When they began this work, the young people saw that the soil on this bare slope was a wonderful black soil. The slope faced south in full sun, and the possibility of retaining water from spring snowmelt and rain convinced us that this spot was assigned by nature as ideal for growing grapes. We planted vines over an area of 3000 square metres. We worked there for four or five days each year, and in return for this modest investment of labour nature rewarded us with a rich harvest: each 100 square metres yielded at least 400 kilograms of fruit.

In autumn, when the amber bunches of grapes ripen, it is particularly galling to see the several hectares of neighbouring land baking in the sun and producing nothing but weeds. If we were to plant grapes over all these extra hectares, every inhabitant of our village could receive 100 kilograms of grapes each year. And grapes are a source of health, beauty and joy. A person who eats three handfuls of grapes each day lives 20-30 years more than average. And really, in order to create a vineyard on this slope we do not need to spend any money. All that is required is for each able-bodied person from the ages of 16 to 60 to work four days per year. It sounds easy, but for now it is impossible. Our hands are ready, but the souls of many of our people are not yet ready to discover the wealth of nature. It is painfully upsetting and we are deeply concerned by this lack of readiness for happiness (in the words of our young men and women). But for now, our little vineyard, our 12 tonnes of grapes, is a realisation of our dream.



## Stories

### Water in the flask

Through the dry, waterless steppe walks a Traveller. The sun scorches his body, the burning wind cuts his eyes. The traveller has been walking for many hours, but the steppe is endless. He has no strength left. He is very thirsty. He licks his cracked lips with his dry tongue and, breathing heavily, gazes at the far horizon. In the violet haze something dark glimmers. Perhaps it is a forest? High in the sky flies an Eagle. He has noticed the Traveller and glides down, circling above the man. He sees that the man is carrying a flask over his shoulder. The bird's sensitive hearing detects the sound of water sloshing in the flask.

'Traveller, I can see that you are exhausted,' says the Eagle. 'You will collapse and die of thirst. Why do you not drink some water? You have a full flask over your shoulder.'

'If I drink the water, I will not have any hope left,' answers the traveller. 'My strength was exhausted long ago, and it is only hope that keeps me going.'

The Eagle cannot understand what hope is. He circles for a long time above the traveller, his eyes frozen in an expression of bewilderment, like dark beads.

After circling for some time, he flaps his wings and disappears into the burning-hot sky. The Traveller continues on his way.

### What sort of man is Grandpa Karpo?

Grandpa Karpo brought some apple seedlings to the market. He spread them out on the ground and counted them: fifty of them. They were good seedlings, with strong roots and well-developed crowns. People came up to the old man and asked, 'How much are you selling the seedlings for?'

'One and a half roubles,' answered the old man.

'That's a bit too much, grandpa,' people said.

'Please sell them for a rouble.'

'You don't have to buy them if you don't want

to,' answered the old man.

He saw that others were selling seedlings for a rouble, and some for seventy kopecks. When the sun was high in the sky and began to scorch, the price for seedlings fell to fifty kopecks. But Grandpa Karpo stuck to his price: one and a half roubles.

The trading ended, and people left the market. Grandpa Karpo had sold only five seedlings.

He put the remaining seedlings in a bag and took them home.

The next day the old man again brought his seedlings to the market, spread them out and set his price: one and a half roubles.

People criticised the old man, saying 'Look, the roots are drying out... Do you think it is right to torture the young trees? They are living things!'

Grandpa Karpo was silent.

It was like that on the third day as well. No-one bought a single apple tree from the old man.

The old man put the seedlings in a bag and set off for his home.

As he walked through the steppe he came to a deep ravine, undid his bag and threw all forty-five seedlings into the ravine, one after another.

### Cruelty

One summer day five-year-old Yasha went to the pond with his father to swim. It was fun to splash about in the warm water, to play in the hot sand.

Along the steep bank of the pond ran a little pup. Suddenly it slipped and fell in the water. Near the overhanging bank the water was very deep. It was extremely painful for Yasha to hear the plaintive yelping of the little pup. It seemed to be calling for help, but the boy could not swim. He begged his father, 'Dad, save the pup.... It will drown.'

His father answered, 'You can't save everyone...'

The pup gave one last yelp and drowned. The pond fell silent. Yasha cried.

Many years passed. Yasha became a grown man: Yakov Ivanovich. He built a house and had a five-year-old son named Ivas.

It was a fierce winter. The earth was crackling from the frost. One evening a blizzard set in. Someone knocked at the window.

'Who's there?' asked Yakov Ivanovich.

'Kind people, please let us in to warm ourselves... We are travellers... We are freezing. Save us...'

'You can't save everyone,' said Yakov Ivanovich to himself, and out loud he said, 'Go on further... We are crowded here...'

'Dad, why didn't you let them in?' asked Ivas. 'They will die in the cold.'

'You can't save everyone,' repeated his father.

Ivas burst into tears.